**FOURVIÈRE ON THE WAY TO THE SECOND CENTENARY**

**Looking at history from the perspective of our lives today**

1. **A BREEDING GROUND FOR SHARED IDEALS**
2. **And they climbed the Fourvière Hill**

1. Twelve seminarians came to the shrine of Fourvière after a long inner pilgrimage. Their spiritual path had begun in Le Puy, as it was the case for many other pilgrims who wished to visit the tomb of the Apostles in Jerusalem, Rome and Santiago. It was indeed in Le Puy where Courveille had started an inner process after hearing a voice “not with the ears of the body, but of the heart” that told him: *“My wish is that there can be a Society consecrated to me in these times of wickedness and unbelief*”[[1]](#footnote-1).

2. Their inner pilgrimage had crossed the seminary classrooms and courtyards in Le Puy, and then in Lyon, when the diocese was subdivided. This is where Courveille met Champagnat and the other classmates: *“There were about twelve of us. We talked about the Society of Mary whenever we could. This lasted until 1816, when we went to Fourvière as a group to consecrate ourselves to the Blessed Virgin. I celebrated the Holy Mass. The others took communion from my hand, both the priests and those who were not ordained*”[[2]](#footnote-2).

The seeds scattered throughout this fruitful spiritual path germinated and grew thanks to a breeding ground for shared ideals, and found confirmation in a profession of faith and a consecration at Mary’s feet.

1. **Linking up with the early Christian faith**

3. This group of seminarians climbed the Fourvière Hill, an elevated place, a “hill that prays”, where nature offers the universal language of beauty, and believers partake in transcendence. The small group carried a germ in their soul, the seed of a new way of being Church they wished to entrust to the Lord’s Mother, to the partner who walked along with them through the paths of faith. Fourvière was the first Marian reference point of the Marist foundational charism. Fixing their eyes on Mary, the believer, a new cell of the Church was born – a Church that wanted to go in pilgrimage to the sources, to the cradle of the ancestors’ culture, but also to the origins of the faith.

4. The shrine dedicated to Mary stands on the ancient pagan city were the bishop Saint Pothinus was martyrized. He was arrested in 177, under the rule of Marcus Aurelius, together with a group of Christians, who became the first martyrs of Lyon. He died in prison because of the mistreatment he suffered at the hands of his torturers. His successor was Saint Irenaeus, who received the faith from Saint Polycarp, who in turn had received it from the Apostle John. This high land received the early seeds of the faith, and was irrigated by the blood of martyrs. It was a meeting point with the early Church agreed upon by the group of seminarians from Lyon, an early Church with which they connected through the witnesses to the faith, and a place that became a reference icon for their mission.

1. **Stating their intentions and purposes**

5. The pilgrims are twelve apostles newly elected for the mission. Advised by their spiritual director, they envisioned wide horizons for their future. Six were priests; the rest had not been ordained yet. They carried in their pockets a statement of intentions[[3]](#footnote-3) they wanted to place at the foot of the miraculous statue of Our Lady of Fourvière as they committed to devoting themselves to the new Society of Mary.

6. *“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. To the greater glory of God and in honor of Mary, Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. We, the undersigned, wanting to work for the greater glory of God and of Mary, Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, hereby state and declare that we have the sincere intention and determination to consecrate ourselves[[4]](#footnote-4), at the earliest opportunity, to the foundation of the very pious Congregation of the Marists. Therefore, by means of the present ceremony and our signature, we devote ourselves, with everything we own, irrevocably and as soon as possible, to the Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary”.*

7. The Mother of Fourvière welcomed and accompanied the project of this Apostolic Church cell that was being born. *“I was the support of the emerging Church, and I will be so again in the last days. These words presided over the beginning of the Society*”[[5]](#footnote-5), and *“acted as a foundation and a source of encouragement*”[[6]](#footnote-6).

The *“sincere intention and determination”* to consecrate themselves was a collective commitment. The pilgrims’ promise expressed by *“the ceremony and the signature*” took place on July 23, 1816. This is considered as the foundation date and the first official act, although private, carried out by the candidates to the Society of Mary.

1. **Marcellin’s personal consecration**

8. The following day, before leaving Lyon, Champagnat returned to the shrine of Our Lady of Fourvière alone to carry out his personal consecration to Mary and place his ministry in her hands. It was an initiative coming from the depth of his heart and expressing his personality within the group. After the Holy Mass, he prostrated at the feet of Our Lady’s image and consecrated himself using a formula he had written beforehand:

*“Oh Holy Virgin, I raise my hands to you as the treasury of mercy and the channel of grace. I earnestly ask you to take me under your protection and to intercede for me with your adorable Son. Ask him to grant me the graces I need to be a worthy minister of his altar. It is under your auspices that I wish to work for the salvation of souls. I can do nothing, oh Mother of Mercy, I feel powerless; but you can do all things by your prayers. Holy Virgin, I put all my confidence in you. I offer you, I give you, I consecrate to you, my person, my labors and all the actions of my life*”.

9. When they descended from Fourvière, the spiritual pilgrimage of this group of apostles continued along the paths of life: *“After this ceremony – says Father Courveille – each one went to the place where he had been appointed by ecclesiastical authority*”[[7]](#footnote-7). They independently came back several times to place a the feet of the dark-skinned Madonna, a symbol of inclusiveness and universality, the names of the missionaries – who were to take the faith to distant lands – within small hearts made of silver and gold. In the Hermitage, Champagnat placed within a silver heart, which hanged as a necklace from the image of Mary, the names of the brothers he was to send on mission to the parishes and towns as catechists and teachers.

1. **A NEW BEGINNING FOR OUR LIVES**
2. **Today we are also on pilgrimage to Fourvière**

10. Today we follow a centuries-old tradition as we go on spiritual and material pilgrimage to Fourvière, following the example of Champagnat and his companions. Hundreds of Marists have done so. Among others, Brother François visited the dark-skinned Madonna on a spiritual pilgrimage when he wrote a circular on February 2, 1885, to mark the proclamation of the Immaculate Conception dogma.

11. *“But what need do we have, dearest brothers, to seek elsewhere the reasons we have to be confident, the signs of the powerful and maternal protection of Mary, the tangible proofs of her compassionate kindness, and her unrivaled tenderness for her children? Is it not true that our Society offers all this to us continuously, and that each of us can give witness to it?*

*Let us ask a pious novice, a young brother, those who are teaching, the School Directors, everyone in any position, let us ask who has supported them in times of trouble, suffering and danger; who has preserved them from the misfortune of offending God, from succumbing to temptation, and even from losing their vocation; who has helped them overcome every obstacle; how have they succeeded in their tasks, positions of responsibility, and in running their schools; who has made their children pious, docile, diligent and respectful; we all respond:*

*We owe all this to Mary; all these graces were granted to us because we have turned to Mary, we have invoked Mary, we have consecrated ourselves to Mary, and we have placed under her protection and in her good hands our children, our work, and our schools. Oh! What great things, how many miracles and wonders of goodness, mercy and love this tender Mother brings about in favor of the children who love her, and who strive as much as they can to make others love and invoke her!*”[[8]](#footnote-8)

*“This tender Mother, our life and our hope, will not be outdone in generosity and love; she will surely give us new and vibrant signs of her goodness and powerful intercession. The past is indeed a sure guarantee of the future. Who has invoked Mary without being heard? Who ever craved her patronage and received a refusal? No one will ever say that this powerful and faithful Virgin, in whom goodness and love go hand in hand with power, whose gift is always tenderness and mercy, has let down anyone who has invoked her in any situation, circumstances, and spiritual or bodily need”[[9]](#footnote-9).*

*“Blessed is the Brother of Mary who instructs his students about the grandeur and goodness of this tender Mother, who instills in them the habit of consecrating themselves to her every day, and of looking for her maternal protection in all their needs, invoking her in all dangers they face, and in every illness of body and soul!*

*Blessed are also the children who are entrusted to such a Brother! It can be said that his teachings will be for them a source of virtue and holiness, and that the love for Mary he will inspire in them, which will divert them from vice, will surely direct them towards the path of salvation, making them get back on track, sooner or later, when weakness or ignorance sometimes take them astray. What a great consolation for a teaching Brother! What a good reason for trust and encouragement! He will be so happy seeing all his students praying to Mary, consecrating themselves to Mary, loving and honoring her, and being educated under her sight to serve her every day of their lives!”[[10]](#footnote-10)*

12. A number of spiritual guides and pilgrims, such as brothers Juan María Merino, Alexandre Balko and Gabriel Michel, helped many people discover the history of the Marist charism in the Basilica of Fourvière.

1. **The Marist laity in Fourvière**

13. The laity, men and women, to whom Champagnat’s charism would give birth, climbed the Fourvière Hill together with him as father of a new charismatic family.

As he went up the hill on his pilgrimage to Fourvière, the young Champagnat – who had just turned 28, with his choice of life as a priest clearly assumed the day before – carried on his shoulders all the young people that, attracted by his charism, would follow him throughout history. All the people that eventually would be enriched by Champagnat’s charism were there together with him. These are some of the historical consequences of a small act of pilgrimage to a shrine. The future is already in our heart. Marist youth today illuminate their journey of faith with the light that shines in Champagnat’s eyes at the feet of Mary in Fourvière.

14. The young Founder who one day would cut the rock of the Hermitage, who would provide water from the rock to quench our spiritual thirst, who would gather a community of brothers around the table, who would give birth to a charismatic family that would reach many dioceses of the world was already there under the dark-skinned Madonna’s sight.

There he prayed to Mary for each of the brothers and sisters he would need to carry out the project he was placing at her feet. There, in Marcellin’s young heart, the Marist Family of Champagnat – a new charismatic family he would build in the future to consolidate the Church of communion – was already entrusted and consecrated to Mary. All of us were there within Champagnat’s heart. We want to return there to find a new awareness of our origins.

1. **CONSECRATING THE PATH OF LIFE**
2. **The path of life understood as a consecration**

15. Consecrating ourselves means giving ourselves fully. Fourvière inspires the path of our consecration, the new future of our existence, and the new beginning of the Marist Foundation. Consecrating ourselves to Jesus through Mary amounts to updating our baptismal commitment and our religious profession in order to welcome the dawning of a new era. Baptismal and religious consecration: Fourvière invites us to understand the path of life as a consecration connecting us with our Marist origins, so that we can set out for the new lands of our mission.

When the twelve seminarians consecrated themselves to Mary in Fourvière, they underwent a new birth, which we can compare to the rebirth of baptism through the Water and the Word.

The consecration of Champagnat and his companions in Fourvière is a sign of resurrection and new life, an option for Jesus Christ guided by Mary, and a dedication to his Church forever. Consecration to Mary also amounts to a prophetic denunciation of the malignancy that dominates so many human minds and behaviors, which prevent the arrival of the Kingdom of God.

16. Consecrating ourselves to the work of Mary means devoting ourselves to the construction of a Church of communion by taking Mary as our guide. Consecrating ourselves to Mary entails an option to offer a quality service to the Church by educating the faith of children and young people. Consecrating ourselves to Mary implies taking sides with those who are small and marginalized.

1. **Discovering the Marian face of the Church**

17. For this group of pilgrim seminarians, the promise of Fourvière was a solemn and explicit renewal of their baptismal promise. Faith and trust are at the basis of any promise. This is the unavoidable baptismal commitment of every Christian: *“I give myself to Jesus Christ and his Church forever*”. Marists have expressed this dedication to Jesus and to the expansion of his Kingdom by taking Mary as mediator: *“To Jesus through Mary*”, as their motto reads. Consecrating all our being and actions to Jesus through Mary is a way of bringing up to date the commitment of our baptism and religious profession in order to welcome the dawning of a new era.

Commitment to the Church was a specific call for this group of seminarians. *“Mary, who comforted, protected and saved the emerging Church, will save her in the last days*”. In this mission, *“Mary will make use of us, her children. Let us be worthy of it. Through us she will fight against the devil and the world; and through us she will win, if we stand on her side thanks to the purity of our life, and the innocence of our hearts, being worthy of her graces and favors*”[[11]](#footnote-11).

18. Those who signed the Fourvière pledge stated: *“We devote ourselves, with everything we own*”. Champagnat expressed this clearly adding a very personal nuance: *“I offer you, I give you, I consecrate to you, my person, my labors and all the actions of my life*”. The pledge of Fourvière was a practical consequence of their baptismal pledge, and gave birth to the Society of Mary.

19. This historical moment, when we gratefully recall the pledge of these young seminarians in Fourvière, is a favorable time for a new birth through the Water and the Word within our hearts. *“Through Baptism we are (…) reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission*” (Catechism 1213). When Father Colin saw the first concrete expressions of the Society, he encouraged his followers with these words: *“We must try to do what we can now, in the present moment; the work will grow later. God will send someone; men do not grow up suddenly, neither do works, which are never grandiose at the beginning*”[[12]](#footnote-12). Therefore, he invites them to act with no delay, trusting God in order to solidify their decisions. *“We are fools if we pretend to act on our own. Our personal views can only have temporary effects, but the Society must be a lasting work in the Church*”[[13]](#footnote-13).

1. **AN ORIGINAL NEW FACE OF THE CHURCH**
2. **A future of prophetic novelty**

20. The first Marists sensed the future of their lives would be a prophetic novelty. *“The Society of Mary should not follow the model of any previous groups. None of that! Our model, our unique model, is and must be the early Church. The Blessed Virgin who did great wonders then will repeat them now, in the last days, and even in a more powerful way, because humankind will be sicker*” (OM 631).

They strengthened their identity around a charismatic name: *“Let us rejoice in being members of her Society and bearing her name; other new-born communities envy us because of this beautiful name*” (OM 674). The Constitutions of the Brothers also highlight this inspiration: *“In giving us Mary’s name, Father Champagnat wished us to live her spirit”* (C 4).

1. **Mary in the early Church**

21. The role of Mary in the early Church after the Ascension of Christ became a powerful source of inspiration for Father Colin in his reflection on the origins of the Society of Mary. *“The beginning of the Society is like that of the Church*”[[14]](#footnote-14). At that time, when the French post-revolutionary Church was considering herself as a fortified city, and the believers as an army who had to fight the last battle against evil, crushing the snake’s head under their heel, the seminarians who went on pilgrimage to Fourvière sensed a new way of being Church, and understood their identity as something new: in the same way as the followers of Ignatius of Loyola envisioned the “Society of Jesus” at the service of a new Church, and called themselves “Jesuits”, the members of the new “Society of Mary” were to be called “Marists”.

*“The Society should not follow the model of any previous groups*”[[15]](#footnote-15). *“We have no other model but the early Church*”[[16]](#footnote-16). *“The Society began in the same way as the Church; we must be like the Apostles, and like those who joined them, who were many:* Cor unum et anima una! *They loved each other like brothers*”[[17]](#footnote-17).

1. **Open to universality**

22. Claude Colin’s insights are similar to Marcellin’s when they dreamed about reaching all the dioceses of the world. This is a very up-to-date perspective when speaking of internationality: *“Marists must conquer the entire world; they will scatter themselves everywhere, and will never be as united as when they are dispersed by the will of God for the salvation of souls*”[[18]](#footnote-18). *“We want to invade everything*”[[19]](#footnote-19), Colin said, *“because Mary wants to cover the entire world with her mantle*”[[20]](#footnote-20). *“We have no other goal than making the universe become Marist*”[[21]](#footnote-21). A conversation with Cardinal Castracane followed the same line: *“So then all the world will be Marist? Yes eminence, even the Pope; we want him as our leader*”[[22]](#footnote-22). *“No one will be able to resist the Society, and its members will have so much courage that no one will be able to stop them*”[[23]](#footnote-23).

1. **Mary presiding over the believers**

23. Colin recalled the central role of Mary in the Society: *“Remember, reverend Fathers, that we have acknowledged her for what she is indeed, our only and true Founder, and that we have elected her as our first and permanent Superior*”[[24]](#footnote-24). *“She is in charge of the boat that brings all her children to harbor. How could we perish under the banner of such a General? No! Let us have faith!*”[[25]](#footnote-25) *“Let us start walking, going at the head of the believers!*”[[26]](#footnote-26)

The Society of Mary was aware of being a militant Church: *“I always thought –* says Colin *– that the Society was destined to fight until the end of time. Mary was the support of the early Church. She will be so again at the end, and will do it through you. We need, therefore, to fill ourselves up with her spirit, and we must get this spirit from her heart. The Apostles did nothing without consulting her, for the new law was written in her heart, and even before the Incarnation she had been instructed by the Holy Spirit*”[[27]](#footnote-27). *“Mary will make use of us, her children; let us become worthy of it; she will fight the devil and the world through us, and through us she will defeat them*”[[28]](#footnote-28). Mary’s heart is now open to welcome the new Marists in mission.

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1. OM 718, 1-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. OM 718, 1-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *“The text is not actually a vow or consecration formula but a statement of intentions*”. Justin Taylor and François Drouille. *Ascent to Fourvière. Commemorating the II Centenary of the Marist Foundation Pledge, 1816-2016*. P. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *“The consecration is a solemn and high-ranking document. The text was written in first person plural, ‘we’. Its authors formally identified themselves as ‘we, the undersigned’, suggesting that this text was a signed document not to be read aloud, in which case we could expect something like ‘We are gathered here’. The fact of writing it in Latin, with the use of a series of formal and emphatic expressions, indicates that the Marist aspirants wanted it to have the highest possible degree of solemnity”*. Justin Taylor and François Drouille. *Ascent to Fourvière. Commemorating the II Centenary of the Marist Foundation Pledge, 1816-2016*. P. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. OM 582. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. OM 674. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. OM 718 [20]. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Brother François. *Circulaires*, T. 2, p. 214. February 2. 1855. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Brother François. *Circulaires*, T. 2, p. 214. February 2. 1855. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Brother François. *Circulaires*, T. 2, p. 214. February 2. 1855. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Colin. *Au réfectoire pendant la retraite général.* Mayet 3, 271. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Colin. *Au P. Alphonse Cozon.* APM 249, Agenda Cozon. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Cozon. *Postulatum au chapitre général de 1880-1884.* APM 322.581 et 811.3 (A5). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Colin. *Entretien à table.* OM 425 [2]. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Colin. *Entretien à table.* OM 425 [2]. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Colin. *Remarques au P. Mayet.* Mayet 1, 286. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Colin. *Remarques au P. Mayet.* Mayet 1, 286. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. OM T. 2, p. 124, footnote 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Colin, OM 427. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Colin. Mayet 5, 668. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Colin, *Remarques au P. Mayet.* Mayet 1, 275s. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Colin, OM 427 [2]. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Colin OM 452 [1]. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Colin. *Au chapitre général, relation Ducournau.* APM 322.459. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Colin. *Au chapitre général, relation Ducournau*. APM 322.459. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Colin. *Au chapitre général, relation Ducournau*. APM 322.459. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. OM 897, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Colin ES 160, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)